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Aristotelian Piety Reconsidered

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Introduction

Aristotle apparently does not discuss piety in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The omission is puzzling because piety was an important and well-discussed virtue; Plato even devoted a whole dialogue to it, the *Euthyphro*. I will not dwell long on possible explanations. *Prima facie*, Aristotle could have made room for piety, but chose not to: while not an intellectual virtue, piety would fit the triadic scheme of character virtue, excess, and deficiency. Alternatively, piety could fall in the remit of friendship (*philia*), if the pious person is loved by (*phileisthai*) the gods.¹ However, the discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN VIII-IX) does not contain a section on piety. The lack of engagement is all the more surprising because Aristotle usually registers disagreements with his predecessors quite vocally. So, what happened to piety?

While Aristotle does not explicitly put forward piety as a virtue in the *EN*, Sarah Broadie has proposed one passage (henceforth 'the Passage') to contain a clandestine discussion of piety. Piety, she argues, 'puts in an appearance and receives an implicit definition'.²

The Passage

*And the person active in accordance with intelligence, and taking care of it, seems to be in the most excellent condition and most dear to the gods. For if any attention is paid to human affairs by the gods, as it is thought, it would also be reasonable if they both delight in what is most excellent and closest in kind to them (and that would be intelligence) and benefit in return those who love this most of all and honour it, because they pay attention to what is dear to the gods, and acting correctly and finely. And that all this is true of the wise person most of all is not unclear; therefore he is most dear to the gods. And it is likely that the very same person is also superlatively happy; so that, in this way too, the wise person would be happy most of all. (1179a22-32)*³

¹ Aristotle mentions gods, together with parents, as examples of unequal friendships, VIII 12, 1162a4-6; VIII 14, 1163b16-17; IX 2, 1165a24-27. Bodéüs 2000:139 proposes that piety can be truly understood only in the context of *philia* (friendship), but subsumes piety under distributive justice. Broadie 2003:58-60 decisively rejects the latter suggestion.

² Broadie 2003:60.

³ All translations of Aristotle are mine.

We can detect a discussion of piety in the Passage against the background of identifying the pious person with the person dear to the gods (Plato, *Euthyphro* 9e-11b) – in which case the person leading the life of reflection would live most piously. This ingenious reading of the Passage aims to solve two problems at once. By reading the content of the Passage as a covert discussion of piety, Broadie not only finds a place for piety, but she also can make sense of the otherwise disputed text. Most scholars do not take the Passage seriously: either it is misplaced, or merely an addition by a later editor (but not genuinely Aristotelian).⁴ Others have tried to write off the passage as “merely” dialectical.⁵ These scholars reject the passage because they cannot reconcile it either with the EN or Aristotle’s thought at large (more in the next section).

While I find myself much in agreement with Broadie-2003, I nevertheless offer a reconsideration of the Passage. The Passage, I shall argue, belongs to a larger argument about the relevance of prosperity to happiness (1178b33-1179a32) and should be read as part of it. I propose a reading of the superstructure – the life in question is not the practical, but the theoretical life – that lets the Passage fall in place, without anchoring it via piety. Finally, examining the inner workings of the Passage, I argue that we can make good sense of it without recourse to piety. Thus, I offer a reading of the Passage in context that does without piety. *If* my reading is correct – a question I leave open for now – the quest for Aristotelian piety remains incomplete.

Problems in the background

The Passage closes the discussion of happiness in X.6-8, completing the discussion of happiness started in Book I. In chapter 5 of Book I, Aristotle introduces three kinds of life, the life of (vulgar) pleasures, the life of the politician, and the life of theoretical thinking as promising candidates for a happy life. Although he quickly dismisses the first two and shelves the third one for later discussion, he returns to all of them in X.6-8. Aristotle first shows why pleasure cannot play the role of highest good (X.6), before he addresses the question of which intellectual virtue, practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) or theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) should stand at the centercentre of the best life (X.7-8). Aristotle forcefully argues for the superiority of the theoretical life, concluding that “the life in accordance with [theoretical] intelligence ... will also be superlatively happy,”⁴ whereas “the life in accordance with the other virtue” will be “secondarily <sc. happiest>,”⁵ “for the activities in accordance with it are

⁴ See Gauthier and Jolif 1958, *ad loc.*, for the first, and Stewart 1892, *ad loc.*, for the second.

⁵ Burnet 1900; Gauthier and Jolif 1958.

Commented [SA1]: Punctuation?

human” (X.7-8.1178a6-10). Aristotle bolsters the ranking of the best lives by examining the central activities and the corresponding lives in more detail. One argument, at 1178b7-23, pertains especially to our Passage, because it raises two problems. Schematically represented, Aristotle argues

1. The gods most of all (*malista*) are happy.
2. The gods are alive and active.
3. The gods do not engage in ethically virtuous actions.
4. The gods do not engage in productive actions.
5. Hence: the gods engage in reflection.

[6'. For all X: if X is happy, then X is happy in virtue of engaging in the excellent activity expressing X's nature.]

6. Hence: the gods are happy in virtue of their reflecting.

7. The activity of reflection in which human beings can engage is most nearly akin to the activity of reflection in which gods can engage.

8. Hence: reflection will be productive of superlative happiness.

The argument agrees with the Passage on human nature, but they apparently disagree on the gods. The gods are paradigmatically happy, but in virtue of what? They have nothing to do with action; their happiness stems entirely from reflection. While we, unlike the gods, do not engage exclusively in reflection, we can engage in an activity “most nearly akin” (*suggenestâtê*, 1178b23) to the gods’ activity of reflection. Since the activity is such as renders a life happy – it does so for the gods – it will also do so in the human case:⁶ it is *eudaimonikôtâtê*, “productive of superlative happiness.”⁷ The argument hangs on our similarity to the gods. Our intellect is divine (X.7.1177b30-31), and when we use it properly, we assimilate to those who are paradigmatically happy and become happy ourselves. Thus, Premise 7 and the conclusion spell out the basis for the Passage’s claim that the gods delight in the best men: “they (<sc. the gods>) both delight in what is most excellent and closest in kind to them.”

Problem 1: the gods do not act

The argument behind Premise 3 makes crystal clear that gods do not act, virtuously or otherwise: “but which actions should one attribute to them? Just ones? Or would they appear ridiculous, making contracts and returning deposits and so on? ... And everything pertaining to the actions will appear small and unworthy of gods to those who go through all of them.” (1178b10-18). By

⁶ “Human” here takes on the wider meaning, including our divine intellect, as in 1178a8.

⁷ The alternative “most productive of happiness” seems less apt, because the argument suggests that there is nothing else that could produce happiness.

contrast, the Passage claims “the gods benefit [certain people] in return (*antipoiein*)” – as if they were exchanging favours with humans. Since gods do not act at all, how could they possibly *do* anything for human beings?

Problem 2: the gods do not think of human beings

What do the gods think of when they engage in reflection? Although Aristotle does not give a definitive answer in the EN, he nevertheless maintains that theoretical reflection deals with the best and most honourable (*timiôtaton*) things in the universe (1141a34-b3), to which human beings emphatically do not belong (1141a20-2). Together with Premise 2, Premise 5 entails that the gods do nothing but reflecting, a corollary borne out a few lines further down in a comparison between a divine and a human life: “For the whole life of gods is blessed, whereas the life of human beings is blessed only insofar as a certain similarity with this sort of activity exists: and none of the other animals will be happy since they share in no way in reflection” (1178b25-8). “If the gods engage in happiness-producing activity for the whole of their lives and think only of things better than human, then they cannot pay attention to human affairs – contrary to the Passage.”⁸

Unfortunately, the solutions interpreters have proposed on noticing the problems appear jejune:

a) Does Aristotle perhaps only tentatively put forward the points that lead to the problems in the Passage? After all, he uses distancing qualifiers (“seems”, “is likely”) and the non-committal optative mode in the Passage. While these observations are true of the first part of the Passage, Aristotle shifts tone and very firmly endorses the conclusions (“and that all this is true”) – which means he equally firmly endorses the antecedents.

b) Aristotle’s real work is done: he has shown why the life of theoretical thinking is best, according to the principles of Aristotelian philosophy. In the Passage, he seeks to convert those who have a popular view of the gods, but lack the refined, Aristotelian understanding. The argument is merely *ad homines*.⁹ Writing off the Passage in this way does not sit well with the methodological principle Aristotle recalls immediately before the Passage, that true words carry the most conviction: “one should, examine what was said before by referring to the deeds and the life, and when it harmonises with the deeds one should accept it, but when it differs assume it to be mere words” (1179a20-2). “Aristotle will

⁸ A different way of raising Problems 1 and 2 begins with Aristotle’s account of god in *Metaphysics* 12.7-9, according to which god engages only in “thinking of thinking” (*noîêsis noêseôs*). The problem only arises if we can assume that the EN presupposes the *Metaphysics*’ theology – an assumption that lacks support (Bodéüs 2000: 7-13. Cf. Broadie 2003: 64.

⁹ Burnet 1900 and Gauthier and Jolif 1958 *ad loc.*

hardly exhort his audience to look for the congruence between life and words just before dissimulating his words to catch [a some](#) more lost souls. Such a move would surely put off Aristotle's core audience, those who are brought up well, and share, largely, Aristotle's outlook.¹⁰

To sum up, the Passage presents a picture of human beings and human happiness consistent with the previous line of argument. It appears, however, to suppose a radically new picture of the gods that conflicts with the preceding arguments. Since the Passage comes right after the methodological point that exhorts us to scrutinize Aristotle's words, we must face the question, rather than look away: why the Passage? I will answer the question in two steps. In the next section I will show why Aristotle needs the Passage in the context where it appears, before turning, in the subsequent section, to addressing the two problems.

The Passage in context

The Passage, I propose, should be read as part of the next bigger unit of thought. [“The Unit”](#) (1178b33-1179a32), as I shall call it, plays a role comparable to chapters 8 and following of Book I. Chapter 7 of Book I completes the (preliminary) account of happiness; chapters 8-11 examine how well the account chimes with the things said about happiness, both by ordinary people and the wise. Similarly, just before the Unit, Aristotle has concluded (again) that [“happiness will be a kind of reflection”](#) (1178b32), and then he turns explicitly to the wise at 1179a8-13 (on Solon) and 1179a13-17 (on Anaxagoras). Unlike Book I, the present stretch of argument concentrates on only one or two topics: external prosperity (1178b33-1179a17) and, relatedly, god-given good fortune (1179a22-32). Since Aristotle has already used the need, or rather absence of need, for external resources as a benchmark for ranking theoretical wisdom higher than its practical counterpart at 1177a27-b1 and more thoroughly at 1178a23-b7 – why does he go over external resources yet again?

How well the Unit is integrated in the flow of the argument of X.7-8 depends on what we take the contest between the best lives to be. Consider the beginning of the Unit:

And happiness for a human being will also need external prosperity, for our nature is not self-sufficient for reflection, but needs also bodily health [b35] and food and the other services to be in place. [1179a1] Now, one must really not

¹⁰ For more details, see Broadie 2003:61-63 who trenchantly criticises b). This is why relocating the Passage, as proposed by Gauthier and Jolif 1958, does not improve its standing.

think that the person who is happy will need a great many of them, even if it is not possible to be blessed without external goods: for what is self-sufficient does not depend on excess, nor does action, and also without ruling land and sea one can do [a5] the fine things. For one can act in accordance with virtue also from moderate means (and one can see this clearly, for private citizens seem to do the decent things no less than those in positions of power, but even more), and it suffices to have resources to this extent. For the life of the person active in accordance with [the] virtue will be happy. (1178b33-1179a9)

Taking the clue from the last sentence, one might think Aristotle has turned to the life of ordinary virtue, arguing that *it*, after all, does not require so many resources to count as happy.¹¹ But the Unit begins with the person living a life of reflection, the wise person, and then talks about the resources needed for practical virtue. If we take the text at face value, Aristotle would attend to the possible problems the need for external resources poses to the wise person. Since no human thinker is perfectly self-sufficient for reflection, one must be concerned with external goods. One can pursue the goods in better and worse ways, and Aristotle assumes the supremely happy person pursues them in the best way, i.e. in accordance with virtue. Moreover, some virtuous actions themselves require external resources: the wise person, “insofar as he is a human being and lives together with many others, chooses to do what is in accordance with virtue²,” for which he will need money, power, occasion and the like (1178b5-7). While he earlier emphasized that the person engaged in thinking (*tô(i) theôrounti*, 1178b3) will not need resources, whereas the person engaged in grand-scale actions will need many of them (1178b1-4), Aristotle now addresses the problem *of* whether the requirement to act virtuously will hinder the wise person’s living the happiest life.

The problem evaporates, Aristotle informs us, because the wise person need not seek *to* act on a grand scale, requiring a position of power, but rather on a private level. Since acting in accordance with ethical virtue does not require many resources, it will not endanger happiness: the constraint to act in accordance with virtue does not threaten the philosopher’s happiness because the resources required for acting well are easy to come by. If the Unit aims not at establishing that the practical life can be happy, but rather at establishing that reflective will be happy because its practical aspects will not require too many resources, the dicta of the wise fall in place – and so does the Passage.

¹¹ So Stewart 1892:455.

At first glance, the two wise men forward the argument merely by agreeing with Aristotle's main message. At second glance, however, [especially](#) "Solon" [especially](#) leads over to the Passage.

Solon

And Solon, too, [a10] perhaps represented the happy well, when he said that they had been moderately provided with external resources, but had done the finest things (in his view), and had lived moderately: for it is possible that those who possess only moderate means do what one should. (1179a9-13)

Aristotle alludes to a view we find expressed in the meeting Herodotus imagines to have taken place between Solon and the fantastically rich king Croesus (*Histories* I 29-33).¹² Instead of flattering Croesus, Solon ~~rank~~[ranks](#) a certain Tellus of Athens first and a pair of brothers (Cleobis and Biton) second in terms of happiness. While Aristotle distances himself from the details of Solon's view – unlike Solon, Aristotle thinks the *finest* actions will be big-scale and hence do require immense resources (1177b16-18) – [he](#) nevertheless supports Aristotle's claim that one *can* perform fine actions without ruling 'land and sea' (1179a4-5, quoted above): in order to do what one should (*prattein ha dei*), one only needs moderate means. *Those actions* [s](#)-will be part of every happy life, including the reflective one, but they do not raise the bar very high for external resources.

Commented [SA2]: He who? Solon? Please specify.

Anaxagoras

And Anaxagoras, too, seems to have assumed the happy person to be neither rich nor in a position of power, saying that [a15] he would not be astonished if the happy person appeared out of place to the many, for they judge by the external resources, as they see only them. The arguments, then, seem to agree with the views of the wise. (1179a13-17)

Exhibit number two, Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, is the first philosopher to have settled in Athens. Anaxagoras supports Aristotle's view in two ways. First, Aristotle picks a sound [bite](#) supporting his own stance on external prosperity: you do not need riches or political power to be happy, because the political life is not the only way to happiness. Second, and more implicitly, Anaxagoras exemplifies Aristotle's ideal of the reflective life. According to Aristotle's report of

¹² Aristotle cites Solon here as one of the seven sages (cf. 1179a17), as opposed to statesman or poet. It is not necessary for my purposes to decide which parts of Aristotle's Solon belong to the historic Solon, and which ones belong to Herodotus or other figures in the tradition, as Aristotle seems to have Solon-as-presented-in-Herodotus in view. Cf. EN I.10. For the difficulties of establishing the original Solon, see Noussia Fantuzzi 2010:1-17 and Munson 2001:181-[196](#). I thank Stylianos Chronopoulos for discussion on this point.

Anaxagoras, life is worth living only when one lives “for the sake of contemplating the heavens and the order of the cosmos” (Eudemian Ethics I 5, 1216a10-16).¹³ As a resident foreigner (*metoikos*), Anaxagoras was barred from political participation in Athens (just like Aristotle later) – and yet he considered himself happy because he did contemplate the heavens and the cosmos.

Even more implicitly, dropping the name “Anaxagoras” evokes a back-drop for the Passage. Anaxagoras’ contemplations brought him not only happiness, but also made him vulnerable to political scheming aimed at his friend and sponsor Pericles.¹³ Anaxagoras was tried, and found guilty, for impiety or blasphemy (*asebeia*) because he regarded the sun and the moon, traditionally thought to be deities, as stones (Plato, *Apology* 26d-e). One way of reading the Passage, then, would be as an exoneration of Anaxagoras, or rather ‘the intellectual activity for which he stands’.¹⁴ Piety enters the picture if we add the further assumption that Aristotle’s “loved by the gods” stands for “pious,” as it does in Plato’s *Euthyphro*. I do not want to deny that the name “Anaxagoras” may raise the question of impiety and piety, or that those who think of Plato’s take on piety detect an implicit definition of piety in the Passage.¹⁵ However, I would like to explore how we can account for the Passage without that assumption.

Instead of anchoring the Passage on Anaxagoras, I propose to re-examine Solon’s contribution to the Unit. At face value, “Solon” supports Aristotle’s view that the wise person will not need many resources to live happily. Mentioning Solon will no doubt recall the substantive discussion in EN I 10 which examines the relationship between a happy and a complete life. In particular, it will recall Solon’s characteristic view that we can judge a man happy only at the end of his life because of the unforeseeable vagaries of fortune. Putting “Solon” in the context of the Unit stresses the cause of our dependence on good fortune: the lack of self-sufficiency (1178b33). Like Aristotle, Solon does not attribute self-sufficiency to human beings: “no one (who is but man) can have all these good things together [sc. being free from deformity, sickness, and all evil, and happy in his children and his comeliness, and ending his life well]” (Histories, I 32.33-6, tr. Godley).¹⁶ In particular the last item, “making a gracious end of life,”¹⁷ defies human control: the gods may influence a person’s good fortune and end, depending on the person’s attitude. Arrogant Croesus, for instance, will be ruined because the divine (*to theion*) becomes jealous and troublesome (I 32.5-7). The two twins, by contrast, receive the best – here: the best death and hence

Commented [SA3]: Why is Solon sometimes set apart with quotation marks and sometimes not?

¹³ I draw on the authoritative studies Mansfeld 1979 and 1980, which the reader should consult for details and especially the dates of Anaxagoras’ life.

¹⁴ Broadie 2003:68. See also Broadie and Rowe 2002:447-449.

¹⁵ Broadie 2003:67-68.

immunity from reversal of fortune – because they honored the goddess so highly (I 31.22-3). Thus, mentioning Solon raises the question whether human beings, lacking in self-sufficiency, depend for their happiness on the gods' good will. More particularly, Solon suggests only those who are dear to the gods will have lived happily, whereas those who offend the gods will meet their fate sooner or later.

Anaxagoras fits into the subtext of the Unit because his good fortunes seem to have abandoned him. His trial for blasphemy resulted in exile. Is that not proof enough the gods turned their backs on him after he reduced them to stones? No, because the gods only ~~would~~ removed him ~~only~~ from the political center of the Greek world. Having moved to Lampsacus, he was able to continue with his studies, receiving due honors from the citizens for his work. Anaxagoras thus vividly reminds us of the central role of theoretical thinking for happiness. What most people perceive as misfortunes will not be misfortunes to the wise person. He can live happily, as long as he has enough to act decently towards other people, and, more importantly, to engage in reflection. The Passage, then, takes up the questions raised by "Solon" and "Anaxagoras": a) is there a connection between being loved by the gods and happiness? And b) What kind of person is loved by the gods?¹⁶

The wise person who actively uses his theoretical intelligence is the answer to the second question – Aristotle's main target in the Passage. He curtails the answer to the first question – "it is likely (*eikos*) that the person [dear to the gods] is also superlatively happy" – for two reasons. First, he has said so much about the connection between using intelligence and happiness already that we need no further argument. By contrast, the answer to b), which also starts with a contention of the same status, is new and requires argument. Aristotle must explain why it seems or is likely that (*eoiken*) the thinker is dearest to the gods. Second, the EN is not the place to speculate whether the person is happy *because* he is dear to the gods. Aristotle refuses to investigate whether happiness is a gift from the gods in I.9.1099b14, relegating such questions to a different kind of enquiry. The Passage, therefore, confines itself to establishing that the wise person is both most loved by the gods and happiest.

How the Passage works

Let us finally turn to the interpretation of the Passage. The two problems with the Passage disappear with the proper understanding of the gods' relation to human beings. The first question – How could the gods benefit human beings? –

¹⁶ Aristotle pauses over a methodological point (1179a17-22), prompted by the adducing the opinions of the wise, before turning to the Passage. I agree entirely with the explanation given by Broadie 2003:65-67.

can be answered only ~~after~~ we address the second problem, explaining how the gods *could* think of human beings without stopping to think of the best things in the universe.

We can see why the gods do not need to debase themselves to think of human beings if we take into consideration the anthropology ~~that which~~ furnishes Aristotle's view of the best life. In the Passage, Aristotle writes “it would also be reasonable if [the gods] both delight in what is most excellent and closest in kind to them (and that would be intelligence)” — as if the gods cared *only* about the person's intelligence, but not about the compound human being. Aristotle can nevertheless rightly claim in the Passage that “the person active in accordance with intelligence ... seems to be ... most dear to the gods” — because he has distinguished divine intelligence as ~~the~~ leading element from the compound human being and, tentatively, identified each person with ~~his~~'s authoritative and better element (X 7, 1178a2-3). If a human being is intelligent~~ce~~ most of all (*malista*, 1178a7), and the gods delight in intelligence, then the gods do delight in the person, insofar as the person is intelligence. Because our intellect is divine and belongs to the hono~~u~~rable things (1177b30; 1178a1), and therefore meets the criteria for things worthy of divine thought (cf. VI 7, 1141a18-b8), the gods can delight in the person without thinking of anything less than the best things in the universe.

As interpretation of the Passage, however, the reading requires a difference between the gods and human beings, or else the gods' interest in human affairs will turn out to be no interest in human affairs at all. The difference, Aristotle suggests, lies in the kind of intelligence at work. The gods delight in “what is ... closest in kind to them” — which again invokes the previous discussion of the relationship between ~~the~~ human and the divine. At 1178b20-4, Aristotle has argued that the gods are happy ~~in~~ virtue of the activity of reflection, and that the human activity of reflection is most nearly akin ~~to it~~ (*suggenestathê*, premise 7 in the argument above), emphasiz~~i~~ng both our proximity to the divine and a gap: the gods' intelligence and ours are closely related in kind, but not the same. We have already encountered the symptom of the difference: unlike the gods, we cannot engage in the activity of reflection all the time. Why? Aristotle at ~~best~~ alludes to one reason for the differences: “the <sc. virtue> of intelligence is separable” (1178a22) — which at least raises the possibility of excellent activity of an intellect not tied to a body. *If* the gods are ~~disun~~embodied intelligences, then human and divine intelligence would be sufficiently different, because Aristotle presents the human being, even at its best and most divine, as embodied intelligence. Nevertheless, we can be sufficiently elevated so that the gods do not

Commented [SA4]: Do you mean “by virtue”?

Commented [SA5]: What do you mean by “at best?”
Do you mean A. alludes to only one reason? If so, then say it that way.

have to think human thoughts when taking an interest in human beings, but will be able to think about the best things in the universe only.¹⁷

Let us now turn to the other problem with the Passage, that the gods “benefit in return those who love [intelligence] most of all and honour it, because they pay attention to what is dear to the gods, and acting correctly and finely.”¹⁸ Taking account of human beings only insofar as they are intelligent will be reflected both in the benefits the gods confer, and the reasons for which they confer them. a) If my interpretation is correct, and the gods do not think of typically human affairs, such as actions, then the reasons stated here (‘because’ renders participles with *hōs* in the Greek) will not be the reasons occurring to the gods, but an explanation *for us*: a person needs to act finely and correctly and take good care to develop her intelligence in the best way if the gods are to take notice of her. The gods only take the result into account, the activity of a well-developed intellect. b) The benefits they return to a person caring for intelligence will not involve any physical activity, as the gods will benefit the person only insofar as they benefit intelligence, and the theoretical intelligence at issue here will not have anything to do with physical action: it is not about things subject to action (and change more generally), nor can physical changes directly make a difference to it (because it is separable).

Commented [SA6]: Should this be “act” instead of “acting”

How, then, can the gods benefit human beings? The answer depends on the nature of reflection, the activity of intelligence. Unfortunately, Aristotle says only very little about it in the EN. If reflecting comprises quite generally abstract thinking about unchangeable things so as to include inquiry, then we may reasonably attribute a sudden insight that seems to come out of nowhere to a divine source. And, as we all know, these insights take the form of a reward insofar as they only occur to someone who has thought about the relevant question or problem.¹⁸ While the gods send these nuggets of insight to deserving thinkers, interacting in a way with human beings, they will not need to act in any of the ways to which Aristotle objects in X.8.1178b7-17. All the actions unworthy of the gods necessarily require a body; sending a flash of insight does not.

While attractive, the solution does not fully account for the properties of human reflection. First, Aristotle thinks reflection the most pleasant activity, noting that reflecting is more pleasant for those who know than for those who seek knowledge (X.7.1177a25-7). If inquiry is seeking knowledge, it should not count as

¹⁷ Thus, the Passage goes some way to address the challenge, put succinctly by Norman 1969, that Aristotle’s gods are narcissistic and think only of themselves.

¹⁸ Broadie 2003, 64-65, without, however, locating the source of the insight in a deity.

reflection, but rather as a stage of intellectual activity leading ~~up~~ to reflection. Reflection, by contrast, happens only when we need ~~to~~ take no further steps. Taking reflection to be something perfect also helps with a second feature: self-sufficiency. If reflection required some external input – the gods are external to us – it could not count as fully self-sufficient. Aristotle, however, stresses the superlative self-sufficiency of reflection in contrast to virtuous action (1177a27-b1). While the person reflecting will still be able to reflect without other human beings (1177a32-3), successful reflection would nevertheless depend on something external – contrary to the claim that the person engaged in reflection will not need such things (cf. 1178b3-4). In the Unit Aristotle does *not* question the self-sufficiency of reflection, but only thematizes *our* lack of self-sufficiency for reflection – which raises the question whether the need for material resources and power decreases the good person's chances to lead a happy life. Especially mentioning Solon raises the question to what extent happiness depends on good fortune and divine favour. If reflection as the activity central to happiness fails to be self-sufficient, success in reflection would depend on good fortune or divine favour, and would thus be vulnerable to misfortune in a way similar to the practical life, a contingency Aristotle seeks to preclude. Understanding reflection as perfection, then, fits on the whole better with the tenor of X.7-8 that reflection is the best and cannot be improved.

But how *could* the gods benefit us if reflection is completely self-sufficient? If reflection is already perfect, and if we are responsible for developing our intellect, then the gods can benefit the thinker only by providing content suitable for reflection.¹⁹ Remember, Aristotle deems the content of reflection much more divine than a mere human being (VI 7, 1141a34-b1). Of course, the objects of thought are, in a way, there for everyone to cognize – but only those ~~those~~ who i) cultivate and attend to their intelligence, and ii) act correctly and finely will in fact reap the benefit of divine thought. Therefore, only those who engage in i) and ii) will be loved and benefited by the gods:

a) The gods love what is best and most closely related to ~~the~~ them: intelligence. Human intelligence, however, is like the gods' only when it is active (1178b22-3). Hence, the gods will love most those who *use* their intelligence.

b) The benefit becomes clearer when we consider the Passage from the perspective of the Unit, to which it belongs. Stressing the need for external resources, the Unit highlights the contingency of a (human) life on external resources. The happiness of the best life, Aristotle has argued, will not be endangered: the resources needed for virtuous action – necessary, but not central

¹⁹ Either the gods *are* the content, or else whatever is worthy of reflection is for the gods' sake, a relation ~~that which~~ can be spelled out in different terms of approximation or imitation. But Aristotle says nothing about this in the EN.

to happiness – will be moderate. In the Passage Aristotle turns to the activity central to happiness. In contrast to virtuous action, there is no gap between having the right thoughts and motivation and attaining the best results. No good fortune will be needed to bridge a gap – as if reflection comes automatically with good fortune! Thus, the divine care (*epimeleia*) does not consist in constantly watching over us and rewarding or punishing us depending on our actions and attitudes (a view implicit in Solon), but rather in setting up a “mechanism” that automatically provides benefits to those who engage in reflection.

Conclusion

I have provided a reading of the Unit that can explain why Aristotle needs to discuss the connection between external resources and happiness yet again. The dicta of the wise, Solon and Anaxagoras, fit squarely into that project, and Solon in particular helps to lead over to the Passage – without special attention to piety. The interpretation of the Passage itself also does not hang on piety. I have tried to give a sound interpretation of its inner workings in the wake of the chord struck by the Solon passage: the possibility of happiness depending on the gods’ attitude towards us.

I have reached my goal if I have given a plausible interpretation of the Passage ~~that~~^{which} does not rest on the *Euthyphro* assumption that the person loved by the gods is pious. I do not claim to have shown that my interpretation is preferable to Broadie’s, especially since she is able to put to rest the search for Aristotelian piety. Instead, I hope to enable the reader to make an informed choice between two interpretations of the Passage. ~~Especially~~^{Those} those who have independent reasons for the lack of a discussion of piety might find my interpretation ~~especially~~ salutary.

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